

Study of Pakistan's Various Reform Policies Regarding Islamic Seminaries

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ABSTRACT:

Pakistan is an Islamic country based on Islamic ideology where society has an emotional attachment with religion, hence an expanded network of Dini Madaris [traditional institutions of Islamic learning] is prevailing in urban as well as in rural areas of the country; where the teaching- learning process remains continue in a traditional way. While on other hand, at the same time, modern education system is followed by government and non-government run institutions. These two different systems with different ideologies and pedagogical techniques have produced two different social classes with different world views about the way Pakistan should be managed. This situation of education system is worrying. In an Islamic welfare state, ideally speaking, serious efforts are required to be done in order to eliminate the gulf between the two systems entirely having antagonistic approaches. In such perspective, this paper is aimed to study the efforts and practical steps, taken for the reforms and development of Dini Madaris by various governments of Pakistan as per their policies.

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Introduction:

The foremost revelation of the Holy Qurān- *IQRA* {to read}¹ is about 'education' and hence Islam made education a vital right and a significant obligation for both male and female.² This exciting idea of Islam i.e. Education is a religious obligation for all, was a historic event in itself.

A contemporary scholar places related concepts in his words and claims that 'the religion (Islam) which, appeared in the infertile Arabian lands that were both traditionally and socially recessive, brings forward education as a vital role to fight against ignorance. The leading religious transcript of Islam is the Qurā'n, where the term 'Ilm'- knowledge- is used as the second most widespread word'.³ The teachings of the splendid Qurān had shaped a remarkable willingness in the direction of education which packed the blossoms of Islam with marvelous feelings bringing about a civilization that engraved a fresh history. It frequently refers the features of education and its prominence such as:

"Allā'h will rise up, to (suitable) ranks those of you who believe and have been granted knowledge. And Allah is well acquainted with all ye do",⁴ "Are those equal, those who know and those who don't know?"⁵

Accordingly, Madrasah an Arabic term for school or college is no more an eccentric expression. The term, which originates from Arabic word *Al-Dars* i.e. 'to teach' or 'to learn', has grown into identical with the customary places of Islamic scholarship today. Previously, Madrāsas were

the spaces where, in addition to uncontaminated religious studies, numerous divisions of educational fields were taught. As a result the early Madrāsas created arithmeticians, geologists, medics, barristers, statesmen, thinkers, linguists and historians besides producing great Islamic jurists, Qur'anic interpreters and Hadith scholars; such as Ibn Sīnā(Avicenna, Died 1037 AD), Ibn Rushd (Averroes, Died 1198 AD), Abū Mūsá Jabir bin Haiyān (Moses Hoine, Died 804 AD), Al-Zahrāwi (Abulcasis, Died 1013 AD) and Imām Ghazālī (Al-ghzel, Died 1111 AD) were the shining stars of such organizations.⁶

When talking about Pakistan, it comes to us that two parallel education systems are running in the country at the same time. One is the modern education system, which is followed by government and non-government run schools and colleges, while the second is known as Dini *Madāris* system that impart religious education solely. For distinguishing between two, graduates of former one are called "Educated" while the latter as "*ulamá*"[plural of *alim*, a religious scholar and graduate of Islamic seminary]. These two very different systems with very different ideologies and pedagogic techniques produced two very different social classes within the society with very different world views about the way Pakistan should be managed. The two groups are now clashing in the political and social arenas.⁷ amazingly, both classes treat, in some extent, as fed up of each other. The *ulamá* blame the educated class as atheist, non-religious and disobedient while they have been blamed as narrow and dark minded, reciprocally.⁸This situation of education system is worrisome. In an Islamic welfare state, ideally speaking, serious efforts must be made in order to eliminate the gulf between the two systems that are entirely of two different directions. The reformative steps taken for *Madāris* by various

Pakistani governments are an effort to streamline the both and par with each other. Some of these measures are discussed as bellow:

Discussion:

Soon after the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the first educational conference was held at Karachi (Nov. 27 - Dec. 01, 1947) under the chairmanship of the then Minister of Education Fazalur Rehman as per directive of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. It was admitted in the conference that *Madaris* should be federated and they should enhance their resources as well as capabilities to deal with contemporary social requirements.⁹ However, no practical solid step had been suggested nor was a road map set to bring religious and modern education systems closer to each other. The *ulamá* who struggled in Pakistan's Movement were hopeful that both systems will be merged and a new system will be generated but no practical steps were taken.¹⁰

The 2nd educational conference was held on Dec. 5, 1951 and this conference, too, recommended fashioning the Pakistani educational system as per Islamic Ideology but no recommendation was made about *Madaris* system. It might be said here that Pakistan faced a number of challenges such as rehabilitation of millions of migrants from India to a new country, its legislation and settlement of assets with India, etc., etc., The number of *Madaris* was limited at that time or there were no such evidence of contraindications which can lead the government to keep *Madaris* at her priority list.

In 1958, the then Army chief Ayub Khan dismissed the political government in country and imposed Martial Law. First ever in the educational history of Pakistan far reaching decisions were made. A commission was constituted to suggest a reform in educational system under chairmanship of the then Secretary Education S.M. Sharif.¹¹ This

commission is known as Sharif commission in educational history of Pakistan. The commission publicized its report in 1959 and a strategy for bringing the education system at par with contemporary requirements/demands was announced.¹²

The commission was of the opinion about the private religious institutions that curriculum and teaching methods of these *Madaris* were not at par with modern age and only religious contents had been taught in them while ignoring science & Social studies subject. The commission recommended to include, at least, one subject from Economics, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology and Civics in *Madaris*, while the religious curriculum of *Madaris* be reviewed, keeping in view the demands of present complex society in order to influence the minds of modern men.

The International Crisis Group (ICG) commented on the efforts of Ayub Khan stating that Field Marshal Ayub Khan professed liberal ideas and an anti-clerical stance. He opted to expand state control over religious institutions to cultivate a state version of modern Islam, in its bid to contain and co-opt the clergy the Ayub government regulated *Aūqāf* property i.e. nontransferable religious endowments. And *Aūqāf* department was created to regulate shrines and Madrassas and bring religious institutions under state control by integrating them in the formal sector.¹³

Madaris and clergy took the decisions of Ayub Khan as a violent strike over the *Madaris* education system. Being a dictator, Ayub Khan did not take the clergy of *Madaris* into confidence nor consulted with them and tried to impose decision over them. Consequently, it provided an opportunity for the unification of various *Madaris* on one platform besides sectarian differences prevailing between them and Ayub Khan's suggestions failed to be acted upon. The first federation of *Madaris* was

emerged in these circumstances as *Wifāq-al-Madāris Al-Arabiya'h* Multan. If Ayub Khan adopted some democratic and reconciliatory attitude towards Madāris reforms instead of using might and imposing with force, the result would be positive to some extent rather than negative impacts as all the *Madāris* of country got united against the reformative steps initiated by his government.

In 1969, General Yahya Khan was succeeded by Ayub Khan and he formed a commission on education under the chairmanship of then Minister of education as well as Governor West Pakistan, Air Marshal Nūr Khan. The commission recommended various steps which were announced in education policy of 1970 and made it public for comments & suggestions.

The nation welcomed the new education policy. Rarely, it has occurred in history of Pakistan when a government's policy has appreciated by general public.¹⁴ Nūr Khan Commission was of the opinion that science subjects and Math's should be taught at *Madāris* and teachers of *Madāris* should be trained for this purpose. Similarly, it recommended considering the certificates/ degrees of *Madāris* tantamount to government institutions degree/ certificate after devising a proper procedure & formalities in order to provide employment opportunities for both kinds of graduates. Simultaneously, this policy document recognized that there is a dual educational system operating i.e. the modern system and the classical system. The proposal rationalized the need for an integrated system of education based on a 'common set of cultural values based on the percepts of Islam'. It was also suggested to merge religious *Madāris* into normal schools and normal schools should be reformed for getting the fulfillment of ideological requirements of the nation.¹⁵

As the gulf prevailing between religious & modern education systems was discussed in the above mentioned Nūr Khan Commission report, therefore, the *ulamá* welcomed this report and, amazingly, a suggestion came from *ulamá* to establish a board having features given below:¹⁶

An independent *Madāris* Education Board should be established to regulate the *Madāris* which should be comprised of senior religious scholars and two experts of modern education should be included in it. Any one of *Madāris*, who wish to affiliate with this board, its certificate should be recognized and vice versa.

The affiliated *Madāris* should establish an elementary stage school to minimize the difference of classical & modern education up to this level. Only those students should be allowed to study the specific traditional religious curriculum that had completed the elementary stage schooling. The curriculum of *Madāris* should be divided into four categories after elementary schooling (i.e. Primary, Secondary, Bachelor, and Specialization). The Board may add economics, politics and modern philosophy at its own discretion.

The board should not be under the control of any government supervising body rather it should be autonomous and independent in designing syllabus/curriculum and awarding degrees. The government should not provide grants to *Madāris* & board in order to maintain their autonomy rather they should run on public donations. The certificates of board should be recognized and four levels of *Madāris*

education, after elementary level, should be equalized to Secondary, Higher Secondary, Bachelor and Master level.

Due to the political instability of country at that time, due attention was not paid for implementation of the recommendations of Nūr Khan Commission report and suggestions of *ulamā*.

During the government of Zulfiqār Ali Bhūtto (1972-77), the education minister A.H Pirzada announced new education policy. The policy document revealed that *Madāris* running under the trusts will keep functioning and religious schools of Muslims as well as of any other religions or sect will maintain the position as they had before.¹⁷ Besides all that, no piece of policy or strategy was opted for minimizing the gulf between the *Madāris* and modern education system, nor was the curriculum of *Madāris* reformed.

Bhutto government nationalized the education sector but the Madrasās were exempted and remained autonomous. He also attempted to co-opt the Madrasās by offering to grant them the equivalence to public sector certificates and diplomas. The highest degree of the Madrasas was placed at par with a Master's degree in Islamic studies from a government university, provided that Madrasa students had passed the English course at Bachelor's level. Although Madrasa'h clerics spurned the proposal, Bhūtto continued to woo them. Besides all these recommendations, no practical step had been taken for the integration of dual education system nor was the curriculum of *Madāris* touched. Bhutto had a farseeing and persuasive personality. He was a leftist but he took some pure Islamic decisions in his tenure e.g. weekly holiday on Friday and declaring the Ahmadis as non-Muslim but besides all this, he did not pay heed to the *Madāris*'s reforms consciously or unconsciously.

Zia ul Haq, the then Army chief, ousted the political government of Zulfiqār Ali Bhūtto in July 1977. An educational policy was announced by minister of education Dr. M.A Qazi in October 1978. It was recommended in the policy that the *Madāris* would be given proper importance and their students would be provided financial assistance and facilities like government institutions. Moreover, religious institutions will be integrated with national education system in order to end twofold education system in the country.¹⁸

Zia had close liaison with *ulamá* during whole of his tenure (1977-88) but, surprisingly, neither Ziā government initiated any step for integrating dual education system nor did *ulamá* demand it. However, Zia government appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Abdul Wahid Halepota under the nomenclature of "Review of Dini *Madāris*" in 1979. It was comprised of modern educationists as well as *ulama*. In its report, it was unanimously recommended that teaching of modern subjects should be arranged in *Madāris* and examination system of all *Madāris* should be handed over to one central board but it was not implemented, regrettably.

The committee's recommendations could not become law. Still, Ziā implemented much of the *Halepota Report* and also took other steps to streamline the Madrasās. The government directed the University Grants Commission (UGC), in June 1980, to draw up criteria of equivalence for degrees and certificates from the religious sector. The highest certificates, awarded by *Madāris* boards, were conditionally recognized as a Masters in Arabic and Islamic studies. Madrasas were thus upgraded to the level of the formal education system without shifting the balance of studies or changing the mediums of instruction and teaching methods. Since these concessions were made without a corresponding change in the structure

and system of Madrasās, they boosted the sector and encouraged its growth across the country.¹⁹

In October 1999 Pervez Musharraf sacked the democratic regime of Nawaz Sharif. Musharraf, claiming to be a moderate Muslim, declared Mustafa Kamal Ataturk of Turkey as his role model, whereas Ataturk's religious reforms have never been a pleasant experience for Islamists. Therefore, right from the very beginning, the *ulamá* of Pakistan considered Musharraf to be anti-Islamic. And above all, the remarks of Musharraf about religious groups developed controversies. Musharraf came up with Pakistan Madrasah Education (Establishment and Affiliation of Model *Madaris*) Board Ordinance XL of 2001 on August 18, 2001. The Ordinance was aimed to establish exemplary Islamic boarding schools, modernize and train a new generation of moderate and liberal scholars through a full-fledge comprehensive and specialized Islamic education with integration of modern subjects.²⁰

Leaders of the five representative boards of Islamic seminaries considered that the Pakistan Madrasah Education Board and consequently establishment of government Model *Madaris* as conspiracy against *Madaris*.²¹ It was hoped that these model *Madaris* under the government auspices and at par with international demands would become role model for private *Madaris* and, thus, a positive societal change would emerge in culture of Pakistani *Madaris*. But, due to insufficient planning, failing take *ulamá* in confidence and unreasonable implementation strategy, this system came to a halt. The government admitted the failure of these model *Madaris* herself.

General Pervez Musharraf promulgated another ordinance the *Dini Madaris Registration and Regulation Ordinance* in June 2002. This

ordinance required all existing *Dini Madaris* to register with the government and to make financial declarations on regular basis. The *Madaris* which do not follow the instructions would be closed down. This ordinance, like its predecessor, was passed & launched without any pre consultation or consideration of the reservations of the stakeholders of the Islamic seminaries. Interestingly, the ordinance *Dini Madaris Registration and Regulation Ordinance 2002* resulted in the amalgamation of various private *Madaris* Boards, representing respective schools of thoughts, due to common ground and mutual beneficial interests. They established an alliance against the government, "Ittehād-e-Tanzimat-e-Madaris-e-Dinia'h". This alliance campaigned successfully throughout the country against this ordinance that finally the government have to amend.²²

Each of the above two ordinances were promulgated as an extra ordinary one, showing the priority and importance of Islamic regime, but did not attract any public support and praise which an elected democratic Government might have received. At the end of Musharraf's government, no significant step has been taken so far; therefore, a lot of things are to be done for bringing the *Madaris* at par with the contemporary demand and national requirements by the government.

Conclusion:

Right from the birth of Pakistan in 1947 up to 1958, no practical steps had been initiated towards the reforms of *Madaris*; however, President Ayub Khan (1958-69) paid heed toward these reforms for the first time. He professed liberal ideas and an anti-clerical stance and opted to expand state control over religious institutions to cultivate a state version of modern Islam. *Madaris* and clergy took the decisions of Ayub Khan as a violent strike over the *Madaris* education system and gathered on one platform besides sectarian differences prevailing between them, and

resisted against the government. Consequently, Ayub Khan's suggestions failed to be acted upon.

The most desirable step; in context of Madāris reforms, was the recommendations introduced by the Nur Khan Commission in 1969 which were welcomed by authorities of *Madāris*. The *ulamá* did not forward the suggestion of framing a fully autonomous board but the recommendation of commission nor were the suggestions of *ulamá* implemented at that time in both parts of the country, however, when eastern part got separated from Pakistan in 1971, many steps have been taken in new born country Bangladesh for the active modernization of Madrasah Education. Going ahead, in 1978, Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board was formed, which is functioning effectively.

Far reaching steps were initiated in the regime of President Musharraf (1999-2008) and two ordinances namely; Pakistan Madrassa Education Board and *Madāris* Registration &Regulating were promulgated but desired results could not be achieved from the promulgation of these ordinances. After Musharraf's government, no significant step has been taken so far; therefore, a lot of things need to be done for bringing the *Madāris* at par with the contemporary societal demand and national requirements by the government.

Recommendations:

- 1: The Madāris reforms may be taken on win-win policy basis instead of absolute winnings, in order to establish harmony and confidence between the government and Islamic Seminaries prevailing in the society. Accordingly, these Madāris should be streamlined and encompassed effectively in the National Education System.
- 2: The Madāris reforms should be treated on rational and permanent basis rather than cosmetic measures.

- 3: The Ministry of Religious Affairs does not have experience or expertise in education. Therefore, the Pakistan Madrasah Education Board should be transferred to the education departments of provinces. This could reduce redundancy and guarantee that reform of Islamic education is treated as a national educational priority.
- 4: The two reformative ordinances of creation of Pakistan Madrasa'h Education Board and Madāris registration/ regulation, promulgated by Pervez Musharraf, did not receive the broad's public support or the critical study that an elected government might have generated. It is, therefore, suggested that in currently democratic regime, after consultation with the authorities of Islamic seminaries, should reviewed these ordinances properly in order to make them successful and desirable.
- 5: While striving for reforms in respect of Madāris, the government should incorporate the recommendations made by *ulamá* in response to Nūr Khan's education report in 1969.

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